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CONCORD

A Journalistic Ministry of Students at Luther Seminary

December 12, 2007

St. Paul, Minnesota

Volume 37, Issue 4



Navigating Ecumenism

Sharing the road

Centering on God

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Plus: A mass of mail, breakfast in "Hell," Christmas zombies and the superiority of Catholics (in football)

Letter from the Editor

By **Nicholas Weber**
Concord managing editor

Ecumenism: the buzzword that can mean so much, and can sometimes mean so little. It can be used for good or for ill. It can mean a wonderful cooperation between churches in order to do mission and to reach out to hurting people and communities in the name of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, it can mean a ridiculous and unnecessary compromise on core principles and a watering down, not just of Lutheran or (insert denomination here) ideas but also the very things that make us Christians.

When I first arrived at Luther Seminary, I found that there seemed to be two equally distressing camps of Lutherans, though they could not have been more different. Some seemed to be rushing to give up all positive parts of Lutheranism, indeed, even Christian orthodoxy itself, in an effort to make people feel good or to unify disparate Christian denominations. On the other side, there were those who seemed to be in a Lutheran cocoon, a warm and comfortable place to perfect their theology. This seems to come at the expense of trying to engage the world — taking the risk of being labeled as “un-Lutheran” by trying to reach out to and work with our Christian brothers and sisters.

What do we do with this? First, it is necessary to acknowledge that the entire Christian community is not Lutheran. Being in the Midwest gives a false impression as to the makeup of the Christian world. Thus we have the idea that our lives as pastors will consist of ministering to “true” Lutherans, leaving us with plenty of time to sneer at Evangelicals or whoever the next less-than-theologically-perfect group to come to our neighborhood may be.

At the same time, we are Lutherans for a reason. We hold to a common canon, creed and confession. The Lutherans are called to maintain our integrity as Christian Lutherans and to use that canon, confession and creed to proclaim Christ and serve others, not belittle them.

Since we at the seminary (both Lutherans and non-Lutherans) have the strong theological background of each of our denominations, let us evaluate it, study it and even take pride in that background. At the same time, let us not forget the purpose or end of such theology: to learn how to better serve God and neighbor.

From the Mann Himself

Ecumenism

Conversation and mission strategy



By **John Mann**
Seminary pastor

In seminary, I was an ecumenical student in a broadly ecumenical seminary. It was a very rich educational experience. God has blessed me through 35 years of parish ministry with the great gift of ecumenical colleagues. My ministry began in a small university community where six pastors from six different denominational churches met weekly for breakfast and common mission. We all shared concerns for campus ministry. We feasted when one of our group members came or went. We were like family and kept each other honest.

Soon I was elected to preside over a board of 14 county ecumenical agencies, serving as its interim director for 18 months during their search process. The conversations, cooperation and creative mission created there still inspire me.

Since then, I have served on synodical ecumenical committees, dialogue, and common mission efforts. I have also benefited from lectionary and leadership study seminars that were broadly ecumenical. My ministry would have been hindered without these contacts and friendships.

I have watched the ELCA become more dialogical and cooperative in mission with other Christians. During the course of my ministry we have moved from being ecumenically standoffish to showing true ecumenical leadership.

I celebrate this movement for two reasons. First, it has been my experience that Christians learn more about the faith, and about their faith in particular, through conversation with others with whom they differ. We also make some progress in revising the language of faith for a new time and place.

Second, this usually leads to more missional cooperation. Given the enormity of the world's problems, the only effective way to address them is in concert with our brothers and sisters in other traditions. Thus we can make a difference concerning poverty, injustice, peace, and the shape of our culture.

As students go forth from Luther Seminary into active ministry, I hope they are aided and guided and supported by their friends and neighbors in ministry from other traditions.

CORRECTION: A quote attributed to C.S. Lewis in the film *Shadowlands* was mistakenly cited as a quote from Lewis himself on page 8 of the Nov. 14 *Concord's* print edition. The error was corrected in the issue's online edition.

CONCORD

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Readers are encouraged to interact with the *Concord* in a variety of ways. Articles and “Letters to the Editor” are welcomed, as are less formal responses offered through the online version. All submissions should include the author's name, telephone number and, if applicable, class standing. Submissions should be received in our mailbox in the Olson Campus Center (98); at our office, Gullixson 10; or by e-mail. The managing editor reserves the right to publish, edit, or disregard all submissions.

Luther Seminary: It's Not Just for Pastors

I'm writing this in class. Yes, you read right, I'm admitting that I zoned out in class. I can even tell you when it happened: the professor said for the fourth time, "Well, when you are a pastor..." It was then she granted me the permission to not listen. Her lecture was not for me. The lecture was only for 50 percent of the class: the M.Div. students. Most M.A. students on this campus will tell you that they feel like a second-class minority. I've done the math; approximately 50 percent of the students on the campus in classes are not M.Div. students. This means that in any given class there are a fair number of people who are not going to be pastors. It is time for the administration and faculty to take note of the language that is used when referring to the leadership of the church.

The invisibility of lay leadership is not a problem exclusive to Luther Seminary. I recently had a conversation with Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson in which he presumed that because I was a senior, I had just returned from internship. He seemed to be caught off guard when I explained that fieldwork for diaconal ministry candidates happens after coursework, and he was unaware of the number of non-M.Div. students at Luther. I'm not sure which bothered me more: the presumption that because I was in seminary I was seeking ordination or the lack of knowledge about diaconal ministry. I asked if he

thought the church was prepared to absorb the non-ordained into the leadership of the church. He had no answer for me.

The clergy and the diaconate cannot begin to work together until we are viewed as the equals that we are in leadership and in ministry. Word and Sacrament does not hold Word and Service on a leash: they walk arm and arm through the ministry field. In order to evoke change in the greater Church, we must begin by evoking a paradigm shift in the culture of the seminary. We must begin with acknowledging the gifts and calls of all people. Some of you might think this sounds familiar: Luther calls it vocation. We must use language of leadership and not the exclusive language of the academy, and we must talk to each other about our particular vocations.

My challenge to the community is this: Begin to ask the question: *What is missing from the leadership of the church, and who is the missing piece?* The chances are the answer will not be ordained clergy. The hand cannot see and the eye cannot touch, and thus the church cannot function without both the clergy and the diaconate.

Amy Santoriello
M.A. senior

Responsible Theology or Apocalyptic Pantheism?

In an institution based on biblical literacy, exegetical excellence, scholastic reason, historical relevancy, and missional leadership, I found last month's *Word & World* lecture by Mark Wallace (on Nov. 7) disappointing. The good works proposed were mixed liberally with poor science, inverted exegesis and questionable theology.

On three points I heartily agree: Humans have a negative impact on our ecological environment, scientific and political structures are unable to affect real change, and the church, despite having contributed to that destruction in the past, is in a good position to foster better environmental stewardship. The speaker sees something is wrong and wants it changed. Unfortunately, this good goal was then pursued in a utilitarian mode, using the tools of biblical eisegesis, to show us how we ought to live, rather than to proclaim what God in Christ has done for us. Natural history, grammar and scripture all fell prey to emotional appeals emanated in the guise of exegetical creativity.

For example, the ideas used in the

lecture were cloaked in problematic Spirit theology: Support for a feminine Spirit was assigned in part to the loving bird-God's "hovering" (NIV; Deuteronomy 32:11, cf. Genesis 1:2). Feminine biblical images for God exist, however; the hovering (Deuteronomy 32:11) in Wallace's bird-God context is a different image. Rather than Wallace's soft dove of peace, this image is that of a (grammatically masculine) eagle hovering over the fledglings to "incite" them out of their nest and into the dangerous blue yonder!

At a broader level, I disagree with the underlying (and unsupported) claim: that if we infuse the church with panentheism and see creation as God's sacred embodiment, we will then inherently respect creation. I have great hope in God's work of new creation through Christ. From that perspective I'm an eternal optimist in future possibilities. However, I'm also painfully aware of the uncomfortable fact of sin among humanity. Though the idea of the progress of society is attractive (cf. *Star Trek* theology), I'm not convinced

that our species is less sinful today than many thousands of years ago.

I was disturbed by the assertion that we ought to intentionally create and propagate new theologies as the means to motivate (mentally manipulate?) the masses, even if the end is creation care. While an "all-encompassing moral structure" may make sense in the study of the philosophy of religions, I like to think that the power of the gospel of God extends beyond moral motivation. Finally, working backward from goal (environmental stewardship) to means (e.g., theological imagery of the Spirit boxed into all four cardinal elements, or nature-boy Jesus as St. Francis of Nazareth) smacks to me of eisegesis, pouring the nature of God into the text, rather than allowing God to be exegetically revealed out of the text. Thus I am concerned about having this approach to biblical texts held high as this year's *Word & World* example.

In God's transforming care,
(Earthen vessel) Dean Grier
M.Div. middler

Strength in Diversity, Not in Denomination

“At times such as Christmas, guests from different denominations join us for worship. How do we faithfully minister to them? When they encourage us, do we critique their theology or receive it as helpful Christian support?”

As an ecumenical student at Luther, I find this statement from the Nov. 14 *Concord* (in the invitation for contributions to this issue) to be an everyday example of the blindness and ignorance at Luther regarding the ecumenical student population. It is a fact that a quarter of the students are ecumenical. In fact, we have such a substantial ecumenical population that we are one of the only seminaries to have an ecumenical coordinator on staff. My point, in short, is that the statement made in the last *Concord* is outrageous and insulting to the ecumenical students on campus.

We, as Christians of all denominations, do not worship together only “at such times as Christmas,” nor are we guests who are simply visiting. We, too, are students here at Luther, and are a part of the seminary community that is often ignored. How can this article state, “different denominations join us?” Who are *we* but a seminary community of students, staff and faculty that is made up of many different denominations, and some with no denominational

designation? The assumptions made in the *Concord* statements are that the “us” in the sentence means Lutherans. This exclusive language, though perhaps unintentional, is a commonplace example of the ignorance practiced within our own seminary community.

In response to the question of worship, then, *we*, as a diverse community at Luther, are continually worshipping together. Hasn’t anyone noticed? It is not just “at times such as Christmas” that people “of different denominations” are worshipping together at Luther; it is each day that the chapel bell rings. People of different denominations are not “joining us for worship.” We need to seriously consider this ecumenical diversity as we plan worship so that we do not exclude the quarter of our own community who belong to “different denominations.”

I believe that the community at Luther is astute, able, perceptive, warm and inviting—these qualities are part of the reason that I became an ecumenical student here rather than at another seminary. Why, then, do we as a seminary community not open our eyes to see that our brothers and sisters in Christ are more important than denominational divisions? Lutheranism is very common in this region of our country, and it carries with it a strong heritage and an even stronger sense of identity. Our seminary community’s sense of

identity, however, should be rooted in the strength that comes from our ecumenical diversity rather than in the fact that the majority of us are Lutheran. Our community is made up of many voices, many identities, many different stories, and this is where our strength lies—it is not in our denomination.

It is good to ask questions about ecumenism and even better to engage in dialogue, but it needs to be a conversation that begins and thrives first within the context of our own community. We need not look outside our community to find ecumenism. Moreover, we need to encourage each other as Christians regardless of denomination. And when we of “different denominations” encourage each other, we should not first critique “their” theology but rather our own. We must begin to take ecumenism seriously within our own seminary community.

Lauren Davis
M.Div. junior

Editor’s note: In phrasing the cited invitation for contributions, we at the *Concord* deliberately avoided using the word “Lutheran” so it could be read as an observation that various denominations receive visitors from traditions other than their own, not as a statement from an exclusively “Lutheran” perspective.

In the next CONCORD: Power in the Church

When we examine life in the church, we often end up discussing power in some fashion: theologically, ecclesiastically, pastorally, among the diaconate and among the laity. Many operate from a top-down perspective, others from a bottom-up idea, and others aren’t sure how to use power. All in February’s *Concord*.

Articles are due **Thursday, Feb. 7.**

If interested in being solicited for articles in the future, please send an e-mail to concord@luthersem.edu.
Pay rate is \$15 per article with up to 250 words and \$25 per article with more than 250 words.

FROM DEBRA COLLUM, ECUMENICAL COORDINATOR

“Ecumenical students” in reference to only non-ELCA students is a misnomer. Believe it or not, there are plenty of ELCA students who are truly ecumenically minded. They do not think only in the categories of synods and bishops, law and gospel, faith and works. On the opposite side, there are non-ELCA students who would prefer to only do their vocational work within their own faith tradition.

It has been recognized that the name “ecumenical student” is not an accurate or even helpful way to name Luther Seminary students who are not ELCA. Yet no one, including the ecumenical coordinator, has come up with a suitable substitute. Surely someone in our community can. **A prize will be given to whoever does come up with a name suitable for non-ELCA students.**

Submit your suggestions to dcollum001@luthersem.edu. We trust that all submissions will be tasteful and will seek to honor students, faculty, staff and the seminary.

Faculty Profile: Karoline Lewis

By Joel Smeby
M.A. senior

When Mom and Dad are preachers, what're you gonna do? For Karoline Lewis, assistant professor of Preaching, the answer really wasn't that straightforward. She was an accomplished violinist expecting to settle into some symphony orchestra somewhere—but those long, lonely hours in the practice room became a deciding factor in leaving such intense musical studies behind for a different calling, a calling to work in the church in some capacity. Earlier interests such as riding horses and watching *The Bionic Woman* on TV had already fallen away in favor of academics and music, but her intentions for a music career became tempered during the college years because of that calling.

Still, Lewis spent a short stint after college working at a private school in California, teaching music classes and giving private lessons before finally moving off to St. Paul and Luther Seminary. Still unsure of her vocation within the church, a registrar encouraged her to take Greek. What is a “stumbling block” for many was her ticket into the M.Div. program on the road to ordained ministry. She *loved* Greek, and the following summer she could be found studying Hebrew in the mornings and working on the seminary groundskeeping crew in the afternoons.

Internship was in Mt. Vernon, Wash., an hour away from her fiancé, Mark Lewis, also a Luther Seminary intern. Back in St. Paul, they married just before graduation. After CPE and a brief period of chaplaincy, both at the University of Minnesota, Karoline Lewis wanted more schooling and was enthralled by a professor of homiletics and New Testament, Gail O'Day, at Emory University in Atlanta. There in Georgia she eventually completed a Ph.D. thesis on the Gospel of John, became the mother of two boys, Stellan and Sigurd, and was called by Amazing Grace Lutheran as associate pastor, finally a preacher.

What's the state of Lutheran preaching today? Someone had asked her recently why she said it was *biblical* preaching that she taught. “Is there some other form of preaching?” implied the questioner. Apparently so. Lewis says that preachers sometimes get so wrapped up in preaching doctrine (and other things), as opposed to embedding themselves into the “particularities” of the text for the day, that they play down the living Word of God and don't allow the Word to “speak” to the congregation.

So the preacher has now become a teacher of preachers. Still, we're fortunate to be able to listen to her play that violin in chapel.



Lewis

Connecting Christmas and Christian Life

By Festus Alomaja
M.A. junior

Think about what you're going to do when you are about to have visitors in your house. You clean the bathroom, vacuum the rugs and carpets, dust the furniture and so on. Then how do we show everyone our own special way of celebrating someone as important as Jesus Christ? Try to hold a conversation about things one could do for Christmas these days—things you will hear about are Nativity scenes, trees, exchanges of gifts and cards, parades, carols and parties. Almost all nations, even atheistic ones, celebrate Christmas. This is an import event for the people in the society of Yoruba (Nigeria). According to this culture, a child born into the world is something to celebrate. Matthew 2:11 (the greetings of the Magi) is the favorite and most frequently used text.

The story of Christmas goes like this: When Jesus was born into a world of poverty to homeless refugees on the outskirts of Palestine, angels appeared in the sky singing, “Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth ...” (Luke 2:14). If the angels are correct, Christmas requires us to welcome God's gift of peace on earth.

Like residents of Southern California who have recently suffered wildfires and earthquakes, we are often reminded of the preparations we need to make to prepare for a natural disaster. In Minnesota it is all about winter storm warnings. What about unexpected tragedies such as the death of a loved one in a gang shooting, suicide or other tragic circumstances of the homeless and the hungry refugees? Today gangs are a major problem for young people throughout this country.

A few years ago I had the privilege of meeting and talking with many young homeless people through Buffalo (N.Y.) City Mission as a volunteer. They told their own simple stories in the crossroads of their young lives: stories of divorce, unhappiness and neglect at home and rejection by their communities. The society is not prepared to deal with the growing needs of homeless people. The truth is there are people around us in need of comfort, relief and happiness this Christmas. The healthiest and most viable society would be the one that best provided for such needs as food, shelter and health. It is not what you *receive* but what you *give* out of your heart to a person who has nothing.

All Christians agree with others more than they disagree in their belief systems. Protestants and Catholics believe that we are all committed to give whatever comfort, relief and joy we can offer to people in need. Being “God's servant” entails willingness to set aside personal interest in favor of the greater good. Jesus Christ Himself teaches that to follow him means to love all those around you, to speak his words to all those around you, so that the world would look at you and say, “Wow! No greater love than this.”

We cannot escape the fact that Christmas is about happiness. Is Christianity also not about making people happy? It invites us to be human in an inhuman time. Behind the story of Immanuel is that God wants to become human and show us how to be human. For us, perhaps the best way to celebrate Christmas and welcome the beautiful gift of “peace on earth” is simply to be human, despite all the negatives around us, and trust that our response to God's gift is to show peace, compassion and love like the child Jesus.

Ecumenism or Bust!

Finding the full flavor
of Christianity

By Aaron Hoffman

M.Div. junior

“One of you says, ‘I am a Lutheran’; another, ‘I am a Methodist’; another, ‘I am an Episcopalian’; still another, ‘I am non-denominational.’ Is Christ divided? Was Martin Luther crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Luther?” (adapted from 1 Cor. 1:12-13).

Ecumenism is about embracing the beauty of the differences between all of us in the universal church. Because we are one family, we have the privilege of being in fellowship with brothers and sisters from every culture and tradition. Being ecumenical, we affirm what is universal in the church, in our faith.

The questions become: What do we have in common? What do we share? What can we affirm together? One place where I have seen a real example

of ecumenism is Moshi, Tanzania. I served there as an intern in an Anglican church for a year with my wife. In our community there were people from all different Christian denominations and nationalities. We all worshipped together and supported each other. The church was a mix of foreign nationals and local Tanzanians. We had to work together and share traditions in order to meet the needs of the entire congregation. This was both a challenge and an opportunity for growth for everyone.

For those of us who were missionaries from the United States, Europe, Australia, etc., we needed each other for support as we struggled to work in a foreign environment. This helped us to unify and not linger on points of contention among us.

We have so much to learn from each other—there is such a richness and diversity! We all share the same Spirit, yet we all express our faith a little differently. What a shame if we don’t taste all there is to taste in the church. Will we really have a full view of Christ if we only look within our own denomination, our own race, our own culture or our own nation?

Two Vignettes and a Comment

A view of ecumenism

By Arland Hultgren

Asher O. and Carrie Nasby Professor of New Testament

When discussing ecumenism, two experiences come to mind. The first one is my experience at Union Theological Seminary, New York, where I did my doctoral work. I was a graduate of a Lutheran college and seminary, and I am grateful for the grounding that both had given me. I had a place to stand and

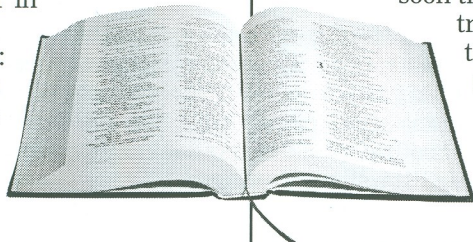
an identity. But my assumptions about that stance and identity in the larger world were challenged on going to New York. I was brought up and educated to think that Lutheranism was a rather major player in the religious landscape of our country—indeed, on the world scene. But Union was a place where—all of a sudden—being Lutheran put me into a rather small minority. And beyond Union itself, the New York scene was a place where Lutherans were exceedingly rare, surely less than one percent of the population. It became clear to me very

soon that most people around me were deeply formed by Christian traditions quite different from my own. The net effect was that the ecumenical setting, in which things Lutheran seemed strange and even inadequate to some, forced me to become more self-consciously Lutheran but also more realistic about the place of Lutheranism within Christian thought and life.

The other experience worth noting has been my participation twice a year on behalf of the ELCA at meetings of the Faith and Order Commission, which is related to the National Council of Churches but is much more comprehensive. There are 35 member churches (with a membership of 45 million) in the NCC, including the ELCA, but Faith and Order has strong representation from churches not a part of the NCC, including the Roman Catholic Church, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Pentecostals, and others. The goal of Faith and Order is to work toward “visible union” (not mergers, unless the churches want them) of the various participating churches. The experience has been one of tremendous learning, forcing me to set aside some inherited stereotypes, and be surprised on many occasions about what participants have to offer the churches. It has been especially exciting for me to observe the great interest Faith and Order participants have in the ELCA and its full-communion agreements with others. The ELCA gets talked about again and again as a model for others to consider. My term of office in Faith and Order ends at the end of this month, and I shall miss those meetings and the friends that I have made.

To conclude, over the years I have experienced a major shift. In grad school days in New York—which were also days of the Vietnam War and the height of the civil rights movement—I had to deal with the challenges of being Lutheran in the midst of people who found the call for justice to be so much more clearly articulated in their traditions than in Lutheranism (as they understood it). But in frequent conversations with ecumenical friends in more recent years I have discovered people who have come to consider those sturdy both/and paradoxes of Lutheran theology to be helpful hermeneutical lenses for figuring out the ways of God in the world. Moreover, at least in Faith and Order the “Lutheran voice” is very much wanted, and the ELCA has become an important player in ecumenism both there and in other venues—a development that I would not have predicted during the earlier days of my career, but a gratifying one.

*... The ELCA has
become an important
player in ecumenism ...*



Presbyterian in Luther Land

Finding richness in the 'other'

By Karin A. Craven

M.Div. senior

"And the conflicts about how to interpret the Western present (modern, antimodern, postmodern) can often prove to be either blunt or subtle refusals to face the fascinans et tremendum actuality of our polycentric present. The other must become genuine others for us—not projections of our fears and desires. The others are not marginal to our centers but centers of their own. Their conflicts and their liberationist self-namings demand serious attention of our own center on their terms."

— David Tracy, *On Naming the Present: God, Hermeneutics, and Church*, p.5

We live in a world with many centers. At Luther Seminary we are called here to learn, together, about how to speak from the center of our faith, from the new creation that we are becoming, from that broad place of mercy at the foot of the cross. As a Presbyterian I came here four years ago to learn how to speak my faith more clearly and out loud with others who are "not like me." It was the difference, that "otherness" of the Lutheran tradition that attracted me to this seminary. I wanted to learn how to engage positively and publicly, as a congregational leader, with those who are not me, who are "other" than me, yet who are a part of me.

What I have discovered is that there is a wealth of diversity within the Lutheran tradition. There is no one monolithic face that represents it, even if at the same time, people use familiar language, "buzz words" if you will, as a shorthand in conversation, e.g., "law and gospel", "first form and second form Lutherans." This code language can function to open up dialogue into rich conversation if there is time, curiosity, and initiative to explore what is meant by those words; it can flatten conversation into superficial niceties; and it sometimes can label and sort people into philosophic camps that seem worlds apart.

I have delighted in learning more about my faith as I learn new languages of orientation from people whose experience of God is uniquely their own yet also speaks to me. Sometimes these experiences are informal and happen in hallways or on sidewalks instead of the classroom.

I wonder how small conversations like these can be connected with larger opportunities to learn the skills of how to engage in difficult conversations for the sake of the common good. Engaging differences in a more public way is what we are called to do as congregational leaders. In a recent conversation with a member from a philanthropic foundation, this question was posed: "How does Luther Seminary prepare you to speak as public leaders in the area of social justice issues, especially the topics of homosexuality, abortion, and euthanasia?" People

I am de-centered and re-centered by other people's experiences of God.

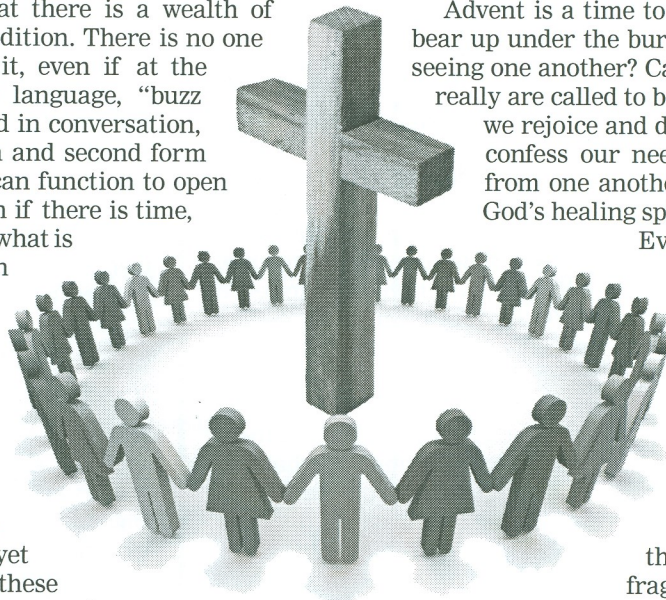
outside the church look to its leadership for learning how to have direct, substantive conversations about what matters to them, what keeps them awake at night as they wrestle with decisions.

As a community I think that we need more practice so that we can grow into articulate, kind and strong leaders who do not shrink from facilitating those hard conversations that happen in the public square and that have to do with a variety of differences. At times, "otherness" is divisive in the classrooms. The broad roominess of God's love has shrunk to a narrow ideology. This is not an ecumenical issue. This is an issue of respect among our brothers and sisters in Christ here on campus. It is an issue of spirited leadership in the world. Ultimately, it is an issue of congruency between what we believe and how we act. In fact, talk about ecumenism can be an easy way out of tough conversations about the heart of the matter, about how we hold one another in the light of God's love: "The others are not marginal to our centers but centers of their own."

Advent is a time to slow down and to listen. Can we bear up under the burden of really listening and really seeing one another? Can we allow others to be who they really are called to be in their baptismal identity? Can we rejoice and delight in such difference? Can we confess our need for forgiveness from God and from one another? Can we hope for and trust in God's healing spirit to move in among us?

Even in the gathering darkness of this winter season, I rejoice in the coming light. There is hope of new life here. For I have experienced trusting love in conversations with strangers now become friends. Sometimes I feel alone, as only we can, when we bear up under the always surprising work of the Spirit. Emptying, then new creation. And always, the fragile vulnerability. And so there are days that I walk around campus and feel

infinitely fragile, pregnant with inchoate feeling and disorientation. I am de-centered and re-centered by other people's experiences of God. This is the work of education. This is the experience of conversion. This is entering into the Kingdom of God. This is the rich complexity of being Presbyterian in a Lutheran context with other ecumenical students. Yet I am not alone, and I rejoice. There are other people—staff, faculty, students—who dare to be vulnerable as we learn and live together in the power of the Spirit. Thanks be to God.



Ecumenical, Interfaith at Luther Seminary

By Debra Collum
Ecumenical coordinator

This fall Luther Seminary achieved a milestone. Before adopting the strategic plan, we had already accomplished one of its goals: to enroll 200 ecumenical and interfaith students. Two hundred students are more students than are enrolled at “normal”-sized seminaries in the United States.

These students are in different degree programs. They represent many other Protestant denominations—Baptist, United Church of Christ, United Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopal—and Roman Catholics and Islamic faith traditions. We also have students from the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

These students bring to Luther Seminary a rich diversity of theology and life experiences. As these discussions are shared we realize our differences. The Baptists don’t baptize infants, the UCC don’t have bishops, and the Presbyterians and Episcopalians have to take written ordination exams on top of their seminary class work.

But in these discussions we also hear our similarities. The Baptists may not baptize infants but, like all of us, are deeply concerned for the spiritual nurturing of children. The UCC don’t have bishops, but they still have to deal with committees and paperwork so that they can be ordained or credentialed. The United Methodists have a theology that owes some of its development to Martin Luther. The Presbyterians are not Calvinists; they are Reformed—a big difference. If we are listening, we may find places in which these students help us to grow in our faith and understanding of God.

When the students who represent the holiness traditions begin speaking in classes about the work of the Holy Spirit in the world, are we challenged to listen carefully and deeply? When the students who

are from Lutheran, Presbyterian and Methodist traditions in Africa, Southeast Asia or India speak of the movement of God among the poor in their countries, do we listen with appreciation for the deep insights into humanity and God these students bring to the classroom? When students who are from congregationally based churches share their concerns, struggles and joys about church polity, do we hear our own concerns, struggles and joys reflected in their stories? When students representing Islamic traditions speak up in class, are we interested in their worldview? Can we expect God to do something good in our lives as we share with students of other faith traditions?

What an ecumenical and interfaith presence at Luther Seminary means will depend on the attitude the individual student (or faculty/staff member) brings to the conversations, discussions and experiences that they share with those of another faith tradition. An attitude of genuine interest and inquiry will ensure that a student will experience a richness that would not be available without a diversity of faith traditions on campus. Closed-minded, narrow thinking and doctrinal rigidity do not prepare one for ministry.

Ecumenical and interfaith students find their way to Luther Seminary believing that this is the place to which God has directed them in their preparations for whatever calls God has placed on their lives. They choose to engage in dialogue with more than 600 Lutherans of the ELCA in order to obtain a theological degree. More than 200 ecumenical and interfaith students choose to call Luther Seminary their eventual alma mater. We have been chosen by the “other” even when our hospitality is lacking because the “other” sees in us something of God’s work in the world. And they have chosen to trust us with their vocational formation! May God, through us, honor their trust.

Ecumenism on the Web: Match these statements with their denominations!

1. “The unity of the church, as it is proclaimed in the Scriptures, is a gift and goal of God in Christ Jesus. Ecumenism is the joyous experience of the unity of Christ’s people and the serious task of expressing that unity visibly and structurally to advance the proclamation of the Gospel for the blessing of humankind.”

2. “... Ecumenism must always speak the truth, never compromising the integrity and purity of... teachings, but always respecting the sincerity of the religious convictions and spiritual sensitivities of others.”

3. “... The one church of Jesus Christ, established by God in the power of the Holy Spirit, is called to break down dividing walls of hostility that separate churches from one another and to build up the fullness of communion that binds churches together in common faith and witness.”

4. “Your attempt to use the jumpword **ecumenism** has failed because we have not set up an association for that word, deleted it, or you do not have permission to view it.”

5. “... The Lord of Ages wisely and patiently follows out the plan of grace on our behalf, sinners that we are. In recent times more than ever before, He has been rousing divided Christians to remorse over their divisions and to a longing for unity. Everywhere large numbers have felt the impulse of this grace, and among our separated brethren also there increases from day to day the movement, fostered by the grace of the Holy Spirit, for the restoration of unity among all Christians. This movement toward unity is called ‘ecumenical.’”

6. “We are prepared ... to discuss ... in so far as this can honorably be done, such practical and equitable ways as may restore unity. Thus the matters at issue between us ... may be discussed amicably and charitably, our differences may be reconciled, and we may be united in one, true religion, even as we are all under one Christ and should confess and contend for Christ.”

- A. Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America
- B. Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
- C. Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
- D. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
- E. Roman Catholic Church
- F. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Answers: 1. D, 2. A, 3. F, 4. B, 5. E, 6. C

Eat Your Way

Through the Twin Cities

HELL'S KITCHEN

89 S. 10th St., Minneapolis
(612) 332-4700
www.hellskitcheninc.com

By Hannah Johnson

M.Div. middler

One of my favorite songs as a teenager was Newsboys' "Breakfast." I'm not sure if it's because it names one of my favorite cereals, but I can still recite the chorus lyrics from memory: *When the toast is burned and all the milk has turned, and Captain Crunch is waving farewell, When the big one finds you, may this song remind you that they don't serve breakfast in Hell.* Now, after all these years, I beg to differ: They sure do serve breakfast in Hell—at Hell's Kitchen, that is. And as the restaurant self-proclaims, and as our group raved, it is "damn good food."

Hell's Kitchen is located in the heart of downtown Minneapolis, just a half-block around the corner from Nicollet Mall. Without a keen eye, it's easy to miss due to the quality of their signs. If you miss it, it takes a good 10 minutes to maneuver back through the one-ways to find it. Parking is limited, and in the spirit of downtown, costs an arm and a leg, but it is well worth the adventure to "Hell."

The atmosphere is interesting, to say the least. Walls are covered in blood-red paint, the lights have an ancient, spooky feel, and if that isn't enough to make you want to go back to a favorite hangout, there are fake crows in the corners that add to the fun. Don't let this stop you, though! Breakfast is their specialty—part of the reason they are only open until 2 p.m.

Our group ordered some of their most famous dishes, and we were impressed. The Mahnommin Porridge melted in your mouth, the Apple-Cured Smoked Bacon convinced us that "bacon has never gone down so smoothly before," the Toasted Sausage Bread made us want to have bison sausage every day, and their phenomenal homemade cornmeal pancakes stopped us dead in our tracks. Even the coffee was enough to make us want to go back for more.

The prices were a little high for a student's budget—at least for breakfast—but, in the end, well worth it. We wish we could join the downtown business crew every Friday morning for a relaxing meal. Few other places delight with such great service, a unique atmosphere and unbelievable food. And if you're lucky, you might even be able to take home your very own crow to remember your trip to Hell's Kitchen!

Up Next:

CASA VIEJA

2176 Seventh St. W., St. Paul; www.casavieja-mn.com
Hosted by Janel Kuester
Friday, Jan. 18; meet at Olson Campus Center parking lot at 5:30 p.m.

A Season of Giving

... and Asking

By Karen Treat

Luther Seminary parish nurse

Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands and call on your name. **Psalm 63:3-4**

I began playing a Christmas CD in my car the second week in November. My children were in an uproar. Another reason to think their mother was weird.

I love this time of year. I am lucky to have had a life of heartwarming Christmas memories.

The same is not true for everyone. There are many who have family problems that make family gatherings stressful. Some have recently lost a loved one, making memories painful and living in the present difficult. Some don't have families to celebrate with. Budgets are tight, and spending wears on our peace of mind. Christmas is not the season to be jolly.

Situations that make the holy season of Christmas a burden require tender care. You can't pretend to be happy. It is a time to reach out to another, ask for what you need to get through the holidays. Give yourself some grace. Keep in your heart that the birth of the Christ child is the promise of life abundant on earth and in heaven.

December is National Seasonal Depression Awareness Month. Season Affective Disorder is different from the holiday blues. This disorder may begin in September and often goes through April. The symptoms are related to the changing of the season and the shortening of the daylight hours.

Symptoms include increased sadness, anxiousness, sluggishness, increased irritability, changes in appetite and sleeping for irregular, long periods of time. The symptoms affect the quality of life.

One common treatment for Season Affective Disorder involves the use of artificial light to simulate sunlight. This treatment is called Bright Light Therapy (BLT). In BLT, people with the disorder sit directly in front of a light box every day. The amount of time a person needs to spend by a light box varies greatly among individuals and changes as the season progresses. Some people need as little as 40 minutes of exposure daily; others require several hours. It is not uncommon to combine BLT with psychotherapy and medications. Because there are many causes of depression, it is important to consult with a health-care provider or mental-health professional before seeking treatment.

For more information: www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/highlights/december2003/sad/#three.

This is a wonderful season. For those of us who can, 'tis the season of giving. For the others, it may be a season of asking. God bless us every one.

Living in the Eternal Present

Christmas Edition!

By Katie Fick

M.Div. middler

I have always been deeply steeped in holiday culture. The season of Christmas appeals particularly to my mother, especially the cultural side, given that the things she enjoys most generally make noise and light up. And there's nothing more loud and lit up than how we celebrate Christmas.

This means that in addition to what was around the house, such as having a doormat that would play "The Twelve Days of Christmas" whenever you stepped on it, or a motion-detecting wreath that would sing "We Wish You a Merry Christmas" when you walked by (things my father would turn off at every chance, only to have them blare back at him next time), I knew as a seventh-grader that the man singing "Holly Jolly Christmas" on the radio was Burl Ives. This won me a pen from my science teacher. (If this isn't a big enough clue as to my popularity in middle school, let me also tell you that I was frequently seen with an extra book to read during free time, such as Norman Schwarzkopf's autobiography.)

I had portions of *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*, by Barbara Robinson, memorized. I knew (and still know) all the verses to the Christmas and Advent hymns. And no matter how much theological training I have, I still love Christmas and other holiday stories that have nothing to do with the birth of Christ. These days just about any movie or television show is called a holiday movie. The ABC Family channel, for example, is having "25 Days of Christmas" and celebrating by showing such holiday films as *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* and *The Princess Diaries*. But I still have a few suggestions for your holiday enjoyment that hit a little closer to home.

If you are looking for something sentimental to read, I can recommend what my aunt Audrey gave me for Christmas when I was 8: *Seven Stories of Christmas Love*, by Leo Buscaglia (who once joked that he owned the copyright on love). The

title pretty much gives it away—these are Christmas stories from Buscaglia's life that were particularly meaningful. The book is out of print but can be found used for a dollar or two on Amazon.com. I don't know how you feel about Christmas zombies, but if you want to laugh so much you annoy people around you, then Christopher Moore's *The Stupidest Angel: A Heartwarming Tale of Christmas Terror* is for you. Moore is best known for his book *Lamb: The Gospel According to Biff, Christ's Childhood Pal*, but while occasionally funny, *Lamb* was a bit too blasphemous even for my taste. *The Stupidest Angel*, however, hits all the right notes of lunacy in the midst of what can be a stressful season.

I suppose we all have our own favorite Christmas music—my iPod is filled with everything from Augustana College's vespers services to the Muppets. I have appreciated the way digital music has become so (legally) accessible—iTunes has a free holiday download every week, and dozens of holiday albums and playlists on sale—I picked up *A Charlie Brown Christmas* and an album of *Christmas Number Ones*, which included my old friend Burl Ives. And National Public Radio's *All Songs Considered*, a free music podcast, features a great holiday compilation every year—even the one from 2006 is still available. I hope if I have been good this year to also add *A Motown Christmas* to my collection.

I think people can pretty much discern the good television specials that are on during this time—this is why shows like *A Charlie Brown Christmas* and the animated *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* are on every year, whereas I haven't seen *Alf's Christmas Special* on live television since my mother recorded it. And while I watched *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* every year as a kid, suddenly the adult in me has become ultra-conscious of the gender overtones in this quaint show—why are only *male* reindeer being trained to pull Santa's sleigh? And why does Rudolph's father tell his mother that she can't go looking for her missing son because that's "man's work"? I feel comforted by the fact that I watched this show so often as a child and found it to be completely harmless.

I want to wrap up by talking about movies. My husband insists every year that we watch *It's a Wonderful Life*, but I have only convinced him to watch *Miracle on 34th Street* (the original 1947 version) every other year. I can't figure out why: it's the wittiest Christmas movie ever made. The irony of using Santa Claus as the figure who stands against the commercialization of Christmas, together with the whimsy and warmth of the story, make this my favorite holiday movie.

When it comes to Christmas entertainment, it is often hard to locate Jesus, and we're left, like Charlie Brown, wondering if anyone knows what Christmas is all about. I just recently recorded *The Nativity Story*, the movie that came out last year telling the story of Jesus' birth—but I haven't watched it yet. I find myself wondering if it will be any good. And that's why I'm sort of relieved that television and movies have shied away from telling the story of Jesus' birth—I don't want them to make it boring. I love the Gospels, and relish listening to the nativity stories. But they are not entertainment—they are part of what we hope and believe. I hope we all take the time as the semester ends to worship and reflect and also to have fun.

Your one-stop source for self-justification

Excuses, Excuses

This month's problem:

Disappointing Christmas Gift

- **Procrastinator:** Citgo was out of Wiis
- **Responsible Lutheran:** The ELCA catalog called it a "Good Gift"
- **Forward-thinker:** Toys with lead paint will be collectors' items someday
- **Eschatological:** Exchanged the original gift for Christ's gifts
- **Inclement weather:** In the blizzard, the seminary bookstore was the only option—enjoy the hymnal!



The Concord asks ...

What's the most ecumenical thing you did in 2007?

"Chapel at Luther Seminary."

- Jaddie Edwards

M.Div. junior, Sanctuary Covenant Church



"I went to a Thanksgiving service run by an ELCA church, a Jewish temple, a mosque, an African-American church and Chinese and Indian Lutheran churches."

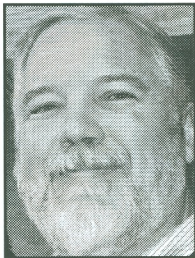
- Stephanie Olson

M.A. senior

"Worship at the Basilica on the University of Notre Dame Campus."

- Alan Padgett

Professor of Systematic Theology, United Methodist Church



"I canceled my annual Book of Concord-burning and weenie roast."

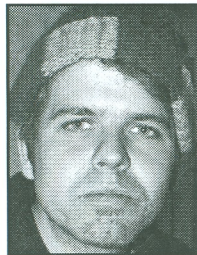
- Jacob Mathre

M.A. junior plus, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

"I slept with a Catholic."

- Dan Morton

M.Div. middler (His wife is Catholic.)



"I stopped referring to the pope as 'the Wonderful Wizard of Rome.'"

- Stew Carlson*

2007 M.Div. graduate, mailroom wizard

* The views of Stew Carlson still do not necessarily reflect views of the Concord or Luther Seminary

Down the Hill

Luther Seminary through younger eyes

Ecumenism. Cool.

Ethan and Sam Miles

Sons of Carol Miles; ages 12 and 10

Dr. Miles: Okay, boys, we've been asked to say a few words about ecumenism.

Sam: Cool.

Ethan: What? How is that cool? You don't even know what that means.

Dr. Miles: All right, ecumenism is about the unity of the whole Christian Church—Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox—and the things different denominations do together to show their unity. I'm thinking you're good people to ask about this since you worship in a Presbyterian church, but you went to an Episcopal school when we lived in Texas, and now you have lots of Lutheran friends from your school and from the Seminary.

Ethan: Mom, none of us call you "Dr. Miles."

Mom: Satisfied? Can we get back to the question please? What does being ecumenical mean to you?

Sam: Well, what's the difference? I mean, we're all God's children.

Mom: Yep. But do you notice any differences? In chapel or worship?

Ethan: Well, yeah. We all say the Lord's Prayer, but we say it differently. And the Episcopalians drink wine, and

we drink grape juice. And the pastors wear different robes.

Mom: Are those things important?

Ethan: No.

Mom: Are there other things that are different that are important? Why do we even have all the different denominations?

Sam: There's one big story, but people believe some of the little parts differently.

Mom: And people just couldn't agree about the little parts, so they ... ?

Ethan: It's stupid when people fight each other over religion.

Mom: Agreed. What do you imagine God thinks about all the fights over religion?

Sam: I think he wants us to get along and have peace. That's what God made us for. For peace.

Mom: But what if one group really thinks they're right about something and everybody else is wrong? Are they better somehow?

Ethan: Catholics are better at football.

Mom: (silence)

Ethan: What?! Notre Dame!

Mom: Does every conversation have to lead to football?

Ethan: Yes.

Dr. Miles: Welcome to my world.

